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PLAYBOYS, SINGLE GIRLS, AND SEXUAL REBELS:

SEXUAL POLITICS 1950-1965

A TRILOGY OF SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Liberal Studies

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Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

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In the years between 1950 and 1965, three significant developments in American culture left women struggling to merge the housewife archetype of the Cold War era with changing attitudes toward sexuality. Because of these cultural shifts, the developments that dominate the research presented here are; first, the changing elements in the lives of the women who pass through the halls of academia during this time of societal flux; second, the impact of the development of the birth control pill; and third, the impact of the publications of *Playboy* magazine and *Sex and the Single Girl*. These developments mark a shift from an age of idealism that permeated the consciousness of postwar Americans to an age of realism concerning American sexuality.

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. REAL LIVE WOMEN: AN EVALUATION OF THE INTIMATE LIVES OF COLLEGE WOMEN FROM 1950-1965	7
3. BIRTH CONTROL POLITICS.....	32
4. PLAYBOYS AND SINGLE GIRLS	46
5. CONCLUSION.....	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	70
VITA	74

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most women's studies scholarship on contemporary women's history focuses either on women's basic heroic effort on the domestic front during World War II or on the period of internal strife that emerged out of a unified American women's struggle among many American women to promote gender equality in the late Sixties and early Seventies. This thesis, however, attempts to address three significant developments in the lives of women during the late 1950s and early 1960s that left women struggling to merge the housewife archetype of the postwar period with changing attitudes toward sexuality.

Immediately following World War II women were shuffled out of the traditionally male jobs they had taken during the war and encouraged to take on the role of the submissive housewife and the doting mother. Joanne Meyerowitz explains, "Historical accounts stress the postwar domestic ideal, the reassertion of a traditional sexual division of labor, and the formal and informal barriers that prevented women from fully participating in the public realm. In this historic narrative, postwar conservatism shaped women's identities, weakened their limited protests, and

contained their activities within traditional bounds."¹ During the early days of the Cold War era, gender and family politics were considered a matter of national security. Female sexuality outside of the traditional marriage covenant threatened the American lifestyle. It was a woman's patriotic duty to marry, raise children, and conduct a pleasantly silent political life.

As the period between 1950 and 1965 progressed politicians received diverse women's voices with eagerly listening ears. In 1961, John F. Kennedy established a Presidential Commission on the status of women. Eleanor Roosevelt served as the Commission's leader. Its goals were to identify and extinguish, the "prejudices and outmoded customs [that] act as barriers to the full realization of women's basic rights.'"² In addition, cultural attitudes toward American sexuality crumbled with the publication of the Kinsey Report in 1953. Alfred Kinsey's expose on the sexual habits of post World War II America exposed much of American moral hypocrisy.

The scientific world, too, contributed to changing the face of American culture in 1960 when the American Food and Drug Administration approved the first birth control pill. Moreover, the fringes of American media culture, with the first issue of *Playboy* distributed in December 1953 and the publication of *Sex*

1. Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America 1945-1960*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 3.

2. Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, (New York, 1995), 124.

and the Single Girl in 1962 encouraged a shift from a marriage-oriented society to a community of bachelors and bachelorettes.

Because of these cultural shifts the three developments that dominated the research presented here were; first, the changing elements in the lives of the women who passed through the halls of academia during this time of societal flux; second, the impact of the development, marketing, and distribution of the birth control pill; and third, the impact of *Playboy* and *Sex and the Single Girl* on the attitudes of Americans toward sexuality. These developments marked a shift from the age of idealism that permeated the consciousness of postwar Americans to an age of realism concerning American sexuality, an age of realism that served as a prelude to the radical reform of the late 1960s.

CHAPTER 2
REAL LIVE WOMEN:
AN EVALUATION OF THE INTIMATE LIVES OF
COLLEGE WOMEN FROM 1950-1965

During the years from 1950 to 1965 America struggled to characterize and reform attitudes toward sexuality. College women received the brunt of the effects of societal change during this period. Though most women only attended college for four years or less, the choices college coeds would face during their years at the university would undoubtedly have an effect on the early years of their post-baccalaureate years. Though colleges and universities claim to promote an atmosphere of open-minded debate and social inquiry today, during this period university students were subjected to more stringent guidelines. These guidelines were especially harsh for women who were attempting to reconcile conservative upbringings that promoted suburban life and family with emerging attitudes toward gender equality that broadened the choices for women's careers, lifestyles, and sexuality.

In order to gain a full understanding of the attitudes toward sexuality that constituted the environment in which college women were reared, an understanding of the atomic age environment of strict gender roles and sexual containment was required. After World War II, the American public received

countless images of the ideal American family composed of two parents, with the father taking his place at the head of the household, and a number of children in whom the mother found ultimate fulfillment by contributing to the solid development of their personalities. Cultural Historian Elaine Tyler May explained,

"the sexual containment ideology was rooted in widely accepted gender roles that defined men as breadwinners and women as mothers. Many believed that a violation of these roles would cause sexual and familial chaos and weaken the country's moral fiber. The center of this fear was the preoccupation with female 'promiscuity,' despite the lack of evidence of any significant increase in premarital sexual intercourse at the time. These rates remained stable from the 1920s to the 1960s."¹

Although all the scientific evidence suggested that changes in female sexuality had been static since the 1920s, the need to contain female sexual desire became urgent during the Cold War. The maintenance of the ideal image of the American family rested on female willingness to accept the subordinate role as wife and mother and to resist sexual temptation until they were married.

Once committed to a marital relationship, women in the postwar period, if they held to the conventions of the era, cultivated and maintained their relationships with their husbands by meeting and exceeding his sexual needs. John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, authors of *Intimate Matters: A History of*

1. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (n.p.: Basic Books, 1999), 103.

Sexuality in America, argued, "marital ideals prescribed that she be an erotic companion to her husband, that the happiness of marriage would grow in proportion to the sexual magic generated between husband and wife."² Though women were expected to remain chaste before marriage, once bound by the institution of marriage they accepted the role of sexual animal, constantly striving to meet their husbands' erotic needs.

Such attitudes toward sexual containment were so pervasive that any behavior that differed, even slightly, from these rigid ideas of gender and sexuality were condemned. Joanne Meyerowitz found, "In the postwar prescriptive literature, women who defied sexual convention were vilified as deviants. Not only unwed mothers, but also women who performed abortions, women who sought abortions, prostitutes and lesbians challenged the domestic sexual order."³ Among the greatest of the culture's sexually deviant, the homosexual woman suffered a life where the cultural elite diagnosed her sexuality as pathological. "Disseminators of expert opinion demonized the lesbian in order to position her... as the essence of female sexual degeneracy."⁴ A woman whose self-understanding kept her from conforming to the sexual standards for women in the Cold War era suffered the consequences of

2. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 309.

3. Joanne Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 9.

4. IBID., 359.

condemnation and ostracism by the mainstream culture. An independent minded woman was often considered to be afflicted with some form of psychological disorder which kept her from taking her "correct" place in society.

Men, too, were stifled by the strict gender roles that most Americans thought contributed to the strength of the nation. Elaine Tyler May described the expectations for males during this era, writing:

National strength depended upon the ability of strong, manly men to stand up against communist threats. It was not simply a matter of general weakness leading to a soft foreign policy; rather sexual excesses or degeneracy would make individuals easy prey for communist tactics. According to the common wisdom of the time, 'normal' heterosexual behavior culminating in marriage represented 'maturity' and 'responsibility;' therefore, those who were 'deviant' were, by definition, irresponsible, immature, and weak. It followed that men, who were slaves to their passions, could easily be duped by seductive women who worked for the communists. Even worse were the 'perverts' who, presumably, had no masculine backbone.⁵

As May pointed out, men also fell prey to the narrow sight of the cultural eye that held sex roles for Americans under careful surveillance. Men who demonstrated signs of homosexuality, promiscuity, or perversion faced the possibility of social isolation and rejection. Moreover, men could not be held to the same moral standards as women because they could be easily seduced by provocative women. Moreover, the responsibility for

5. Donna Penn, "The Sexualized Woman: The Lesbian, the Prostitute and the Containment of Female Sexuality in Postwar America," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 359.

defending men against the aggressive sexuality of promiscuous women fell to wives whose sexual prowess should serve as a shield against the sexual advances of female communist spies. If men's sexual desires were well provided for at home, then men could develop immunity to the seduction of other women, resist the covert operations of the soviets, and maintain domestic tranquility.

The fear of female sexuality was so closely linked to the fears of nuclear holocaust that government propaganda actually associated female desire with atomic terror. Seductive women, wearing hardly anything but pageant sashes baring the names of harmful radioactive rays, infiltrated the pages of civil defense pamphlets that warned of nuclear terror.⁶ In addition, the power of female sexuality inspired terms like the 'blonde bombshell,' which first appeared in the 1930s and served to connect Cold War fears with the dynamic quality of feminine seduction.

Armed with the strict understanding of sexuality and gender roles, young women entering college were bound to a sphere of activity that would promote the ultimate goal of becoming a wife. Women of the late 1950s and early 1960s were taught to believe in the dream of riding off into the sunset of the nuclear family.⁷

6. Defense Civil Preparedness Agency, *Your Chance to Live*, (San Francisco, CA: Far West laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1972), 79.

7. Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, (Plainfield, VT: Daughters, Inc., 1973), 121.

This modern day fairy tale was choreographed even to the detail of fashion that symbolized the ideology of sexual containment at the time. Beth Harvey, in *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History*, wrote, "Underneath it all, our flesh, like our volatile sexuality, was 'contained' by boned girdles and Merry Widows, in an era when 'containment' was a political as well as a social obsession."⁸ Harvey pointed to the symbols of harmony and morality that permeated the postwar culture. Even in the fashion industry, clothing designers and fashion promoters were working to maintain the American ideal.

Suppression of the female intellect paralleled the postwar construction of the ideal American woman. Women learned to "play dumb" in order to attract a mate. Beth Harvey insists that women pretended that they were not academically as capable as men.⁹ Intelligence was not a quality required to be a good housewife. Another example of this mentality was seen in a SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordination Committee) position paper, women declared, "many women, in order to be accepted by men on men's terms, give themselves up to that caricature of what a woman is - unthinking, pliable, an ornament to please the man."¹⁰ Although the SNCC position paper presented a shift in female attitudes

8. Beth Harvey, *The Fifties: A Woman's Oral History*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1993), xi.

9. IBID., 3.

about gender roles, the paper pointed to the consciousness of women in the Cold War era. Women were supposed to be pleasant, subordinate, and largely, ignorant.

Along with maintaining the reputation of a demure, innocent girl, college women were also expected to emit an aura of sexual excitement that would allow them to attract a husband. At the same time that female sexuality was supposed to be contained, women were supposed to start dating at young ages and give all the right signals that would indicate she would be able to please her husband after marriage. May reported that the *Ladies Home Journal* identified girls who were fourteen as "late daters." She wrote, "The 'late dater' was encouraged to develop social skills, poise and charm. The article reassured young readers that it was not too late to attract a beau. Once caught, he was held at bay, while she gave all the appropriate signals to promise sexual excitement in marriage."¹¹ May describes the *Ladies Home Journal* article as giving women the sole control over sexual behavior. Ironically it was argued that a young woman was supposed to aggressively search for a boyfriend but fight off his sexual advances, while at the same time giving up just enough to keep her from seeming frigid.

10. Judith Clavir Albert and Stewart Edward Albert, eds., *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1984), 116.

11. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (n.p.: Basic Books, 1999), 105.

The women in Beth Harvey's interviews consistently expressed the difficulties "sexual brinkmanship" presented in their personal lives. One woman explained, "'Sal and I did 'everything but' sex and through this relationship I was learning about sexual feelings.'"¹² For this woman participating in foreplay that included "everything but" sex contributed to her understanding of her developing sexuality, but the atmosphere of "sexual brinkmanship" was a much more treacherous arena for other young women. Another of Harvey's interviewees reported, "As a young woman in the Fifties, the responsibility for controlling sexual situations was squarely on you. In other words, you were supposed to tell the boy when to stop. You were in a triple-bind. If you went too far, you could be stigmatized as fast; if you didn't go far enough, you risked being labeled cold, a prude; and if you behaved normally under the circumstances - allowing your own passion to flare, then pulling back in terror or guilt - you were in danger of being called a cock tease."¹³ Female sexuality in the Cold War Era put women in a difficult, if not impossible, situation. They were encouraged to remain innocent virgins and to suppress their own sexual desires while simultaneously marketing their sexuality to young men.

In addition to the prevalence of escalating sexual activity in the lives of young women, the postwar culture commodified

12. Harvey, *The Fifties: A Woman's Oral History*, 4.

sexuality as an item that could be purchased with a marriage vow.¹⁴ Meyerowitz explains, "Studies of postwar culture found that government propaganda, popular magazines, and films reinforced traditional concepts of femininity and instructed women to subordinate their interests to returning male veterans."¹⁵ Becoming a subordinate to returning veterans meant marriage and family. Becoming sexually available (by becoming a bride) to World War II soldiers also meant returning to traditional gender roles. Appropriate female sexuality was an expression of patriotism. Sexually aggressive young wives protected the county from communists and provided a service for veterans.

Becoming a valuable commodity in the sexual marketplace meant conforming to the standards of American femininity that were prevalent in the postwar years. A psychology professor, holding a Ph.D. at Pennsylvania State College gave advice to young women who "don't get dates." He surveyed:

hundreds of single men on campus and reported that dateless girls were guilty of careless grooming (grooming was a 'consolation and challenge to the girl who feels her unattractive face or figure prevents her getting dates'), unsuitable clothes, poor dancing, coldness, unattractive appearance, or aggressive behavior.¹⁶

13. IBID., 9.

14. Harvey, 9.

15. Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America 1945-1960*, 3.

Magazine articles and advice columns were filled with prescriptions or remedies for the obstacles that kept young women from having a high market value.

Some women, as they began to internalize their worth in terms of a tradable good, calculated their decisions about sexuality in order to increase their attractiveness. Tyler Barrett recalled, "Because of my height and my general feeling of unattractiveness, I felt my marketability was not so high. I thought I needed my virginity as a kind of extra asset."¹⁷ Virginity was among the many qualities that would increase a woman's net worth. Qualities that contributed to the market value of women included beauty, charisma, a nurturing disposition, and style. Those qualities that would cause a woman's worth to depreciate were unattractiveness, intelligence, and independence.

The publication of the Kinsey report began to chip away at the idealized portrait of the American female. Released on the same day (August 27th) that the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear weapon, the Kinsey report shocked the nation with its discovery of American's hypocritical ideas about sexuality.¹⁸ As one historian wrote years later of the Kinsey report,

16. Gifford R. Adams. "Making Marriage Work: If You Don't Get Dates," *Ladies Home Journal*, July 1955, 26.

17. Harvey, 9.

18. Alfred Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1953), p 468.

Alfred Kinsey let the cat out of the bag in 1953. A sexual revolution had been going on for most of the twentieth century. Women it turned out, had orgasms; they masturbated, engaged frequently in heavy premarital petting and not uncommonly in premarital intercourse; they committed adultery; they loved other women, and as Kinsey pointed out, 'heterosexual relationships could become more satisfactory if they more often utilized the sort of knowledge which most homosexual females have of female sexual anatomy and female psychology.'¹⁹

The Kinsey report shocked America because it reported that attempts to contain female sexuality had failed and that women were not only having sex, they were enjoying it. Further, Kinsey reported that college women, many of whom were engaged in premarital sex (50%), overwhelmingly (a full 80%) disapproved of premarital intercourse for moral reasons.²⁰ The Kinsey report included the strong moral conflicts that women faced concerning their sexuality, but the report also made women aware that they were not alone in their sexual transgressions.

Kinsey's report, though a tremendous event, did not change the lives of American women overnight. And though Kinsey may have touched the minds of college age women, at the time, college coeds were still largely bound by the dictates of college administrators. In Rita Mae Brown's 1973 novel, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, a story about growing up in the late 1950s and early '60s, she

19. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 12.

20. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1953), p468.

commented upon the heavy handed role college administrators played in the lives of college women.

Faye and I discovered a common bond for disruption and we lost no time in establishing a system of payoffs to the building guards, so we could get in and out of the basement windows after the dorm doors had been locked to protect our virginity from the night air.²¹

These policies, commonly referred to as "in loco parentis," where the college was supposed to act as its students' guardian, were designed to protect women, not only from the outside world, but also from their own, unchecked desires.

College administrators, who were charged with providing the moral education of religious institutions and the protective guardianship of parents in addition to providing an academic education, produced a variety of reactions to rising promiscuity (or at least to increasing visibility of promiscuity) on their campuses. Some more conservative writers like Donald Eldridge believed that college administrators were among the few actors who could reshape the moral development of young people. He wrote, "Colleges used to assume such responsibility, however; education in moral and ethical values was once a vital part of their tradition: thus it seems that the colleges are most likely able to reassume such functions if anyone is to do so."²² But college officials typically adopted a policy of moral tolerance.

21. Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, (Plainfield, VT: Daughters, Inc., 1973), 99

22. Donald Eldridge, "More on Campus Mores," *Saturday Review*, 20 June 1964, 58.

Administrators responded to the student's insistence that though the administration would be justified in promoting a moral agenda, such a policy should not be codified or forced upon students.²³ College officials were then charged with educating their students about the physical and emotional consequences of sexual permissiveness, but were not responsible for the enforcement of a moral code on its students.

Though college administrators were stepping down from their responsibilities as moral educators, student organizations were taking on the tasks of educating their peers about sexual issues. At the University of California, the campus's Sexual Freedom Forum lectured on the subjects of sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptive choices and pregnancy options and often distributed informational literature on such topics.²⁴ This new responsibility accepted by student activists created a shift from the authoritative command of college officials that required students to repress their sexual desires to a culturally aware peer pressure that urged students to act responsibly on their sexual impulses.

This shift away from authoritatively defined righteousness marked the beginning of a new morality that insisted sexual decisions were too personal to be subject to the judgement of

23. IBID.

24. "The Free Sex Movement," *Time*, 11 March 1966, 66.

others. Gloria Steinem's 1962 article, titled "The Moral Disarmament of Betty Coed," read,

"For better or worse, the emphasis is now on the individual, and group judgements of individual actions are out of date. A national magazine recently polled college students on attitudes toward chastity and reported that nearly all respondents, male or female, virginal or not, phrased in some way the opinion that 'sexual behavior is something you have to decide for yourself.'²⁵

Sexuality during this period began to shift away from a topic that was strictly taboo to a topic that was more openly discussed but still required very private decisions.

The most important element of the new morality developing on college campuses was its focus on tolerance and its rejection of judgement.

"Most college girls would consider it sophomoric to judge in terms of Good and Evil what goes on in the cemetery across from the University of Michigan's Stockwell Hall or on a sticky leather sofa in the blackness of a Dartmouth fraternity's TV room."²⁶

Issues involving sexuality concerned the greater society only when education and information sharing were involved, otherwise personal choices about sexual behavior were left to the individual.

A greater awareness of women's sexual desire and a reduction of the guilt produced by sexual activity accompanied the increased tolerance and autonomy that characterized the new

25. Gloria Steinem, "The Moral Disarmament of Betty Coed," *Esquire*, September 1962, 97.

morality. Miriam Wells remembered her college years in the 1950s, saying, "I couldn't think about whether things really existed or not, whether it really was a chair, you know. I was wondering if I should be sleeping with this or that man."²⁷ Miriam Wells represented a female population that more frequently revealed their sexual desires and a society that was slowly accepting those desires. Women, too, learned to accept their sexual desire as a natural instinct rather than an awful sin. In a report generated by Bell and Chaskes, from 1958-1968 women had intercourse more frequently at all levels of their personal relationships and consistently felt less guilty about their sexual choices.²⁸ The greater tolerance of women's natural sexual desires freed women of the psychological chains that kept their sexual feelings repressed.

The tolerance for homosexuality grew during these years as well. D'Emilio and Freedman explain,

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a gay subculture had been growing providing the setting in which homosexuals might have developed a group consciousness. The weakening of taboos against the public discussion of homosexuality, the pervasive police harassment of the era, and the persistent work of a small coterie of pre-

26. Donald Eldridge, "More on Campus Mores," *Saturday Review*, 20 June 1964, 58.

27. Beth Harvey, *The Fifties: A Woman's Oral History*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1993), 28.

28. Robert Bell and Jay Chaskes, "Premarital Experience among Coeds, 1958 and 1968," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, (32 February 1970), 83.

Stonewall activists combined to make many lesbian and gay men receptive to the message of 'gay power.'²⁹

The group consciousness that arose in the homosexual community led to the visibility of the movement. Homosexual self-awareness, like the heterosexual awakening, led to a greater awareness and acceptance of homosexuality in the mainstream culture.

Issues of sexuality also dominated the student movements that began to surface during the late 1950s and early '60s. Sexual issues appeared first in the Civil Rights movement. Hundreds of White women joined Black women and men and went south to fight for racial equality between 1963 and 1965. In her widely heralded study, historian Sara Evans reported,

Interracial sex was the most potent social taboo in the South. And the struggle against racism brought together young naïve, sometimes insensitive, rebellious and idealistic white women with young, angry Black men, some of whom had hardly been allowed to speak to White women before. They sat in together. If they really believed in equality, why shouldn't they sleep together?³⁰

Coupled with extremely hostile and sometimes violent conditions, the close proximity in which Black men and White women worked, contributed to their attraction to one another. In addition, in some cases, a White woman's willingness to sleep with a Black man served as the test of her racial tolerance. If a White woman refused the advances of one of her Black peers, she was deemed insensitive to the cause or even accused of being racist.

29. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 319.

The interracial relationships between Black men and White women created a division between Black and White women in the civil rights movement. Evans observed, "Robinson herself hated white women for a period of years when she realized that they represented a cultural ideal of beauty and 'femininity' which by inference defined black women as ugly and unwomanly."³¹

Interracial relationships between Black men and White women served to reinforce the racist, mainstream ideology that black women were inferior to white women. Black women saw these relationships as a blatant attack against the fight for equality. Black men, in the eyes of Black women, were buying into the rhetoric of White mainstream society that placed Black women at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Conflicts about sexuality didn't stop with the Civil Rights Movement. Women who were active in the New Left were also forced to use their sexuality to elevate their position in the movement or be subject to charges of 'frigidity.' Sara Evans argued:

Some of the women refuse to play, either by avoiding relationships within the project altogether or by developing a single, primary monogamous relationship, sometimes even a marriage. Others enjoyed their new 'freedom.' But many women were caught somewhere in the painful middle. They rejected many social norms concerning sexual relationships, but they were confused about what should replace them. People talked about openness, honesty, and democracy in relationships, but few felt sure how such values might be achieved. In the absence of any clear understanding of the ways sex roles continued to shape behavior, the double standard

30. Evans, *Personal Politics*, 79-80.

31. IBID., 88.

collapsed into a void. Men believed that women would simply adopt their own more promiscuous standards. But what then should women do with the needs already socialized into them for security, stability, and dependability in relationships?³²

As Evans explained, the real result of sexual freedom in the New Left was a series of mixed messages that left women in the movement struggling to reconcile what the men defined as sexual freedom with fulfilling the needs of stability and support that traditionally accompanied sexual relationships. Further, because women in this movement were often confined to domestic or secretarial tasks, women often used their sexuality to become close to the central issues of the movement. If they could sleep with the right man, they might achieve real influence in the movement.

College women did not have to be part of these progressive groups to be confronted with conflicting messages about their sexuality. Part of the problems of the sorts of messages being sent to college women lay in the transfer from their protected home environment to a more liberal educational environment. Susan Douglas wrote about a prominent psychologist who found, "that college girls were deeply conflicted between the old message that 'sex is sin' and the new message that 'sex is the ultimate expression of romantic love.'" These young women reported further that "they had been terrorized by the double standard warnings, only to go to college and discover it was all a whopping lie."³³

32. Evans, 152-3.

Along with a change in environment came a change in moral standards and moral freedom. At home, women were largely confined to the moral dictates of their parents. At college, free from their parents' control, students were forced to make their own moral decisions, which were often based less on conventional standards and more on personal conviction.

Conflicting messages were not just a function of a changing environment, however. Sara Evans reported that, "The central issue involved the tension between wanting to be accepted as sexual personas but finding themselves treated frequently as sexual objects."³⁴ It seemed that the actual goal of the sexual revolution was not to increase the physical freedom of women but to increase the physical pleasure of men. Evans stated further, "Men frequently demanded that women accept sex with anyone, any time, or admit they were 'uptight' and 'unliberated.'"³⁵ The actual result of the Sexual Revolution then, was that rather than being released from sexual prison, women had simply changed cells. Women went from being forbidden to participate in sex, much less enjoy it, to being forced into sexual activity. In both cases, women were still denied the same sexual options of men.

What is perhaps the biggest accomplishment of the period preceding the sexual revolution was an increase in tolerance and

33. Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 152-3.

34. Evans, 167.

privacy as they related to sexual behavior. This period removed the moral issues of sexuality from the public sphere and placed them in the private realm. The activity of a college dorm room (then) was now the sole concern of the room's inhabitants, not the business of college administrators or parents.

Accompanying this increase in privacy was an augmentation in self-reliance. The woman whose behavior was the complete result of another person or institution's dogma was not respectable. Steinem wrote,

A sophomore from a Midwestern university, who had had no affairs herself, said, "One girl I know is sleeping with the boy she's pinned to just because everyone else is having affairs, and another girl in my dorm is staying a virgin just because mother said so. They're both phonies."³⁶

Along with increased privacy came increased responsibility. Women who knew themselves made decisions about their sexuality after a careful introspection; conformity no longer dictated their intimate lives.

Coinciding with this change in college women's sexuality, was a slow progression in women's attitudes toward education and economic independence. In 1955, college women were still attending classes with the intent of finding a husband. It was beyond the intellectual realm of most women during this period to imagine pursuing an education as a step toward a career goal. A

35. IBID., 177.

36. Steinem, *Esquire*, 97.

1955 report by the Commission on the Education of Women, "cautioned that ' any proposals for broader participation of women in gainful occupations outside the home must not detract from the importance of their roles as wives and mothers.' "³⁷ This report proved the attitude towards women's education at the time; the main purpose of a woman's education should be to prepare her for her only conceivable occupation, the dual tasks of housewifery and motherhood.

Often though, women accepted this form of education not because of institutionalized sexism, but rather because of their assimilation into a culture where women had only one occupational choice.

It was their own profound belief, internalized from a lifetime of messages, that achievement and autonomy were simply incompatible with love and family. The equation was inescapable: independence equaled loneliness.³⁸

For the majority of women in the late 1950s, who were taught that they could not be completely psychologically healthy without a husband and children, saw no other choice than to forego a career in order to have a family.

Many women of the late 1950s and early 1960s thought combining career interests with husbands and babies was an impossible task, and because women had been taught for years that their most acceptable role was in the home, most women of the

37. Harvey, 51.

period chose diaper pins and kitchen appliances over paper clips and brief cases. Claire Lassiter recalls, "About the closest I ever came to having a fantasy about combining my interests with marriage was, wouldn't it be wonderful to marry a college professor."³⁹ Women of the 1950s sacrificed their personal interests for the benefit of their family. The primary goal for 1950s families was facilitating the development of the husband's career. If a woman was lucky, her husband's career interests would match her interests as well.

This attitude permeated the consciousness even of those women who were pursuing a post-baccalaureate education. Sally Ann Carter was one of these women. Retrospectively, she discovered,

I now realize that in the back of my mind there was always the assumption, even when I was getting my graduate degree in education, that any work I did was temporary, something to do until I assumed my principle role in life which was to be the perfect wife and mother.⁴⁰

Even women who successfully complete graduate degrees found their professional lives to be simple pasttimes, a way to sustain themselves until their wedding dates.

In addition, for some women, college was nothing more than a marriage market. Elaine Tyler May wrote, "College enabled these white women to achieve upward mobility not through their own occupation but by attaching themselves to well educated men who

38. IBID., xviii.

39. Harvey, 46.

had good occupational prospects."⁴¹ College for many women was an investment in their futures because college tuition allowed women access to economically attractive men. Moreover, once they had found a mate many women would dropout of school before finishing their degrees. In 1959, 37 percent of women who started college did not complete their academic careers.⁴²

This husband-hunting attitude on college campuses was the domain of white women only. Of the Black women who entered college during 1959, 90 percent completed their degrees.⁴³ As Joyce Purvis recalls, the reason for this difference was accounted for by the difference in income between White and Black men. Purvis said, "The progression was, you went to college, you got a good job, you got married. The thing you didn't do was quit college or quit work. You were not going to raise a family on one Black man's salary."⁴⁴ Because of the inequity of income in white and Black families, Black women did not have the luxury of dropping out of school.

This attitude toward education began to change when Betty Friedan's ground-breaking study *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963. Friedan insisted, "For women as well as men,

40. IBID., 50.

41. May, 68.

42. Harvey, 4.

43. Diane Ravetch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p 292.

44. Harvey, 61.

education is and must be the matrix of human evolution."⁴⁵ Friedan even went so far as to suggest a GI Bill for women that would pay for books, tuition, fees, travel, and household help for housewives who wanted to use education to pursue careers. Though the progression in society's attitudes toward women's education occurred at a slower rate than attitudes toward female sexuality, by 1965, more women were beginning to pursue education for the sake of enriching their minds rather than snagging a husband who would fill their purses.

The period between 1955 and 1965 brought with it a variety of changes in the intimate lives of women. College women during this period struggled to deal with the mixed messages being thrown at them from the media, church, peers, and their homes. And as if their intimate lives weren't complicated enough, female sexuality became the measure of a woman's social commitment; if a young woman refused to participate in interracial sex or free love, she was often considered "frigid" or "unliberated." Thus from 1955 to 1965, the intimate lives of college women were fraught with confusion. The sexual revolution may have opened the door for greater physical freedom for women, but behind that door was a realm of emotional chaos and societal pressure that left women searching for a way to work their new autonomy into a society that was slow in fully accepting the changing roles of women.

45. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: WW. Norton and Company, 1963), 368.

The problems for women in this period included finding a comfortable place for themselves in an increasingly diverse society. A college woman faced the pressures of peer relationships while trying to balance her obligation to her parents and her religious convictions. The result was an increase in self-reliance and personal decision making and the creation of a personal sexuality that conformed to an individual's life plan. Unfortunately, a college woman, although personally convinced that her choices should be individual ones, had to operate in a society that still demanded conformity, especially in terms of her economic behavior. The college woman's attempt to be multidimensional was undermined by a masculine attempt to keep her sexually confined. Men still expected women to be cardboard cutouts of feminine virtue, while women struggled to escape this plastic mold and become real, live women.

CHAPTER 3

BIRTH CONTROL POLITICS

Among the issues affecting women between 1955 and 1965, concerns about pregnancy and birth control were central to women's discussions regarding sexuality. Abortion was illegal, adoption was difficult, and the birth control pill was not released until 1960. The Pill was not a magic cure for women's birth control problems, however. The issues surrounding the pill included population control issues, racial matters, and distribution of the pill outside of marital relationships. In addition, the fear of pregnancy was not the only emotional consequence that was considered when a woman decided to engage in sexual affairs. Many people give the birth control pill credit for the dissolution of morality, but in truth, the development of the Pill only broadened the selection of contraceptive options available to the American woman.

The American public welcomed the new birth control option, however. With 99 percent effectiveness the pill changed the way Americans viewed birth control devices. In *Sex in the Heartland*, Beth Bailey described the eager reception of the birth control pill. "American women went 'on the pill' in the 1960s. The oral contraceptive tablets that most Americans called simply 'the

Pill,' were approved by the FDA in 1960. By early 1969 eight and a half million women were using the Pill; their numbers had grown by about one million each year from 1961."¹ The tremendous growth in the use of the pill signified the attractiveness of the oral contraceptive option.

Among the Pill's proponents, Gloria Steinem championed the development of the Pill because of its aesthetic and cultural value. She encouraged the use of the pill because it worked chemically and could be taken at times separate from intercourse. In addition, Steinem suggested the Pill increased privacy in the intimate lives of women.

Constant fear was hardly the case prior to the Pill in this country, but removing the last remnants of fear of social consequences seem sure to speed American women, especially single women toward the view that their sex practices are none of society's business.²

With the Pill, women could reduce their chances of becoming pregnant with only their personal physicians being aware of their practices. A woman could keep even her sexual partner ignorant of the birth control process.

Just as the Kinsey report exposed the sexual behavior of women, the emergence of the birth control pill exposed a woman's ability to control her reproductive capacity. For years, condoms and diaphragms had been available birth control devices for

1. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 105.

2. Steinem, "The Moral Disarmament of Betty Coed," *Esquire*, September 1962, 155.

women, but the Pill removed the mechanical apparatus from the process. By increasing a woman's ability to manipulate her reproductive ability, scientists exposed women as creatures of sexual desire who may want to engage in intercourse for recreational reasons rather than procreational ones. But just because the pill was available, largely effective and user-friendly, there was no indication that the emergence of the Pill resulted in a high level of sexual permissiveness.

According to Donald Eldridge, the availability of the Pill had little to do with a woman's decision to engage in premarital sex.

Perhaps one or two percent of premarital sex incidents are due to the Pill. The other 98 percent would stem from basic values, emotional involvement and the courtship system that has evolved in the United States over the last century.³

Attitudes toward conception were influenced by those factors that influence sexual behavior, including education, religion, and family background.⁴

Still, both Beth Bailey and Elaine Tyler May (two historians of postwar sexuality) pointed to the fact that most Americans ascribed the credit or blame for the sexual revolution to the

3. Donald Eldridge, "More on Campus Mores," *Saturday Review*, 20 June 1964), 60.

4. Steinem, *Esquire*, 153.

birth control pill.⁵ But in 1964, Eldridge reported, "Some 60 percent of women today get out of college as virgins, a ratio that has not changed much since the Pill."⁶ Despite the Pill's reputation for destroying the virtue of young women, the Pill affected a woman's intimate decisions only in a small percentage of cases. One of the reasons the Pill was so closely linked to the sexual revolution lay in the fact that the Pill was opportunely or tragically born on the cusp of radically changing sexual mores in the United States.

The birth control pill was not something that could easily be purchased by all of the American public. The fact that the pill required the consent of a physician thwarted many women's access to the drug. Purchasing the Pill was particularly difficult for unmarried women who, if they were women of good virtue, should not have needed birth control prevention measures. Bailey wrote:

When a young; single woman sought a prescription for contraceptives in the 1960s, she was making a statement about her sexual status. Virgins didn't need birth control pills unless they did not plan to remain virgins much longer. Even if a woman felt perfectly comfortable and confident about her sexual status and relationships, in attempting to get the Pill she had to make that status, to some extent, public.⁷

5. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (n.p.: Basic Books, 1999), 195. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 106.

6. Donald Eldridge, "More on Campus Mores," *Saturday Review*, 20 June 1964, 61.

7. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 121.

For women using the Pill, access to the birth control methods lacked complete autonomy. Although birth control pills allowed women to hide their contraceptive measures from their partners, women still were required to expose their sexual practices to their doctors.

In the medical world, most doctors preferred the Pill to other mechanical devices that had to be physically calibrated to fit the bodies of individual women.⁸ The Pill did have medical opponents, however.

Some doctors have expressed medical reservations about their own use on two grounds. First, some women using these pills experience disturbing side effects, including nausea and breakthrough bleeding or spotting. Second, there is still not sufficient data to confirm assumptions that such pills are completely safe for long term use, that is, for use well beyond the current two year limit.⁹

Therefore, the Pill did not arrive on the medical scene without some controversy. Many doctors were skeptical about a hormone-altering synthetic and demonstrated concern for the health of their patients.

But if controversy dominated the reception of the birth control pill in the mainstream medical sphere, university physicians were even more baffled by the arrival of the new contraceptive method. Beth Bailey explained, "What might seem a

8. IBID., 123.

9. Wade Nichols, ed., "Birth Control Pills: The Full Story," *Good Housekeeping*, 155 September 1962, 154.

clear case of doctor/patient confidentiality was potentially blurred by the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, no matter how tattered it might have become."¹⁰ At universities where *in loco parentis* policies were the norm, physicians were torn between university policies and medical obligations to their patients. University officials claimed that availability of birth control would increase sexual permissiveness, while students claimed that pregnancy, and by extension pregnancy prevention, was a health issue that university physicians were obligated to address.

Few doctors were liberal enough to defy university policies in order to prescribe pills to students.¹¹

Harvard, Columbia, Pennsylvania, California and Michigan are among the universities whose health services refuse to prescribe the birth control pill (though coeds who want them can easily seek out a sympathetic doctor in a nearby city) and at the relatively few universities where the pill is obtainable, it is usually prescribed for married students only.¹²

On these university campuses, university policies superceded the doctor/patient relationship.

Issues concerning university physicians and their female patients seeking birth control were based on the prevailing attitudes toward sexuality at the time of the Pill's introduction. Single women who sought the aid of university

10. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 122.

11. Oborn Elliot, "The Pill on Campus," *Newsweek*, 11 October 1965, 93.

12. IBID.

physicians in obtaining birth control pills at the University of Chicago were referred to the institution's psychiatric services; the idea being that women who wished to engage in premarital intercourse were in some way sexually deviant and psychologically unfit.¹³

Preserving morality was the principle reason for denying birth control to college women. But one minister, who was a proponent of population control, believed that morality could not exist in the absence of free choice. Beth Bailey says of this man's ideas, "Morality...existed only in a situation in which there was 'opportunity for choice.' Without 'free access' to contraceptives, students were not making a moral or immoral choice about premarital intercourse. Instead, their choices were constrained by fear or coercion."¹⁴ Although this minister was among the few clergy members who campaigned for unmarried birth control at the time, he promoted the availability of birth control because it encouraged moral development. In the absence of choice, students did not have the tools necessary to consciously decide to do the right thing.

But the issue of morality typically did not affect the use of birth control among college women at all. Gloria Steinem wrote about a magazine poll of 100 college women, "Most replies make it

13. IBID.

14. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 116.

clear that those who definitely want to have affairs are using existing contraceptives and those who definitely don't are unlikely to be seduced by better birth control."¹⁵ Because fear of pregnancy was only one factor women considered when they decided to engage in sexual affairs, and pregnancy fears were often at the bottom of that list of considerations, birth control methods were unlikely to increase the number of women who were engaging in affairs. Most women, in the face of better birth control, still ranked issues of their personal psychological development and the degree of commitment in their relationships above pregnancy issues on their lists of considerations about sexual contact.

Although the birth control pill was not a wonder drug for most women and it did not create an era of rampant sexuality, the Pill brought population control proponents a sense of salvation. Population control proponents, like proponents of female containment ideology, compared their cause to the threat of atomic destruction. "Both nuclear weapons and population growth endanger mankind."¹⁶ Connecting the cause of population to nuclear destruction demonstrated the urgency of the issue.

The population control cause became vogue in the late 1950s, even enlisting individuals in the clergy as well as allies in

15. Gloria Steinem, "The Moral Disarmament of Betty Coed," *Esquire*, September 1962, 155.

16. John D. Rockefeller, III., "The Hidden Crisis," *Look*, 9 February 1965, 75.

other areas. The American Public Health Association (APHA) identified unchecked population growth as a threat to public health in 1959, and in 1963 the group elevated the issue of population growth to "one of the world's most important health problems."¹⁷ In a shift in consciousness from the baby boom years following World War II, the population control advocates during the late 1950s and early 1960s began to think not only in terms of the preservation of life but in maintaining the quality of life.

Articles like Malcolm Muir's 1959 piece titled, "The Avalanche of Babies," looked to the promise of a birth control device that would be acceptable in the American society. "Wherever the Family Planners go today they find the way blocked by superstitions, folk customs, and old wives' tales, in addition to the obstacle of authentic religion."¹⁸ The birth control pill seemed the most likely candidate for the device that would make birth control acceptable in a variety of cultures.

It is important to note, however, that birth control proponents were not attempting to force birth control on women who chose not to use contraception. Rather, they supported the idea that "No one can or should be forced to practice birth control, or to advocate it against his conscience, but neither should he be denied the right to know the facts and to decide for

17. Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 108-9.

18. Malcolm Muir, ed., "The Avalanche of Babies," *Newsweek*, 27 April 1959, 68.

himself."¹⁹ Originally, birth control advocates first wanted to increase birth control awareness as a process of conscious choice to preserve the quality of life by delaying the time when the earth would reach its carrying capacity. But birth control advocates also wanted to answer the desperate pleas of those women with many babies who felt their financial, mental, and nurturing abilities could not be extended to meet the needs of another child.

Birth control advocates also believed in equal access to birth control measures across racial and economic lines. Beth Bailey explained, "Throughout the 1960s, authors also attempted to demonstrate that contraception for America's poor was fully in keeping with 'broadly democratic principles of equal opportunity for all,' Birth control should not be the 'special privilege of the 'well-to-do.'"²⁰ Advocates of the pill believed that every woman should be the sole owner of her ability to control her reproductive capacity, regardless of her income or marital status.

Perhaps the biggest debate over birth control took place in the Black community. Birth control pills spawned a heated debate that pitted militant Black men, who felt birth control stunted the propagation of the race, against Black women who demanded full control over their bodies.

19. John D. Rockefeller, III., "The Hidden Crisis," *Look*, 9 February, 1965, 79.

These Black men felt that birth control pushers were contributing to a carefully hidden program of genocide. One man said, "See that sister there? She's having another baby for me. I need an army, and this is how we're going to get it.'" ²¹ Groups in California, Pittsburgh, and New York, most of them offshoots of paramilitary organizations, protested Planned Parenthood sites in the name of protecting unborn Black soldiers that would be a valuable asset to their army for racial justice. ²²

Black women retorted that they were the only rightful owners of their bodies and that rampant reproduction was causing decay in Black neighborhoods and ghettos. To support this theory, Mary Smith wrote, "Many doctors are concerned because this runaway reproduction - especially in our cities' ghettos - has caused a very poor quality of reproduction. We see prematurity, toxemia, anemia, inflammation of the veins and many other side effects among women with more than four children." ²³ Doctors pointed to health risks associated with high rates of reproduction and proved to be valuable allies in the Black woman's fight to gain social acceptance of the birth control practices.

20. Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 110.

21. Mary Smith, "Birth Control Pills and the Negro Woman," *Ebony*, 23 March 1968, 29.

21. IBID.

23. IBID., 37.

Douglas Stewart, Director of the national Planned Parenthood office of community relations, offered one possible solution to the rift birth control had created in the Black population.

Birth control programs might fare better in large cities if more black people were represented on planning boards of clinics in their neighborhoods. Perhaps this would soften the "white plot" idea which leaves so many people caught between pressures from militant groups and their own wishes for fewer children.²⁴

Planned Parenthood officials were trying to ease the fears that birth control was part of a White conspiracy to eliminate the Black race.

Black women also found a powerful ally in Martin Luther King, Jr., who compared the birth control movement to the Civil Rights movement. King suggested that the birth control movement had identified a need in Black communities and the movement's supporters were taking active steps to improve the quality of life for Black people. The birth control movement was a sort of fragment of the civil rights movement because, he said, unwanted children were one of life's greatest travesties.²⁵ Like population control supporters, King connected birth control with maintaining or achieving a higher quality of life. Invoking the image of a helpless child struggling in a world where he or she is not wanted, King delivered the empathy of Black men and women whose struggle for Civil Rights can be paralleled to the tragedy

24. Mary Smith, "Birth Control Pills and the Negro Woman," *Ebony*, 23 March 1968, 34.

of a child's unrealized potential in a society where he or she is rejected and ostracized. King believed that family planning was a crucial ingredient for the achievement of an elevation in the quality of life for Black citizens.²⁶

The development of the birth control pill was not purely a scientific development, then. This tiny pill sparked debate among entire communities, within the medical community and on college campuses. Moreover, this synthetic drug would be credited with the eventual moral decay of an entire generation and would be targeted as the vehicle for genocide. But comparing the birth control pill to Zyklon B or blaming the Pill for moral degeneracy overestimated the Pill's impact. The major accomplishment of the Pill was that it increased a woman's contraceptive choices, giving her greater control over her reproductive capacity.

The development of the birth control pill increased a woman's contraceptive options. Like her fight for increased sexual freedom, the woman of the late 1950s and the early 1960s faced considerable opposition to the Pill. Access to the Pill, while facilitated by population control groups, was blocked by universities and conservative as well as radical Black power groups. The debate over the Pill placed those who valued a greater quality of life at odds with those who only considered the intrinsic value of conception. Women experienced this debate

25. IBID., 37.

as an obstacle to access to basic health care and the controversy over birth control often kept women from having maximum control over their bodies.

26. IBID.

CHAPTER 4

PLAYBOYS AND SINGLE GIRLS

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Helen Gurley Brown and Hugh Hefner aided the shift, in media culture, from a marriage and family oriented society to one that focused on single adults. Hefner's *Playboy* magazine which began in December of 1953 and Brown's book, *Sex and the Single Girl*, presented themselves as "How-To" guides for single men and women. Among the topics these two works addressed were ideas about money, work, wardrobes, and cocktails, but these items were only accessories for the central theme of both publications. The issue of sexuality dominated the pages of these works and all of the trimmings were designed to aid single men and women in achieving the most fulfilling sexual relationships.

Both *Playboy* and *Sex and the Single Girl* arrived on the market with exceptional popularity. Hugh Hefner's magazine boasted over a million readers by the end of the 1950s and by the early 1970s the magazine was circulated to nearly 6 million people.¹ Similarly, Susan Douglas notes the tremendous success of *Sex and the Single Girl*. The publication remained on the best sellers list for seven months starting in July of 1962.² The

1. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 302.

2. Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, (New York, 1995), 68.

overwhelming circulation of these two publications indicated that a large section of American society who were open to new ideas about family and sexuality. Both publications challenged the concept of the nuclear family that emerged after World War II. Interestingly, Hefner's guide to single life for men arrived nearly a decade before Brown's complementary guide for single women. Male autonomy and independence emerged long before ideas about female helplessness and neediness disappeared. Nonetheless, both publications excited their audiences with increased validation of single life.

Despite their popularity, however, both publications were confronted with the dissenting opinions of those who wanted to maintain the nuclear family status quo. *Playboy's* early issues were filled with letters that both praised and condemned the magazine. Some objections to the magazine made physical rather than written protests to the publication. When a *playboy* representative visited Grinnell College in Iowa, young scholars protested the magazine's arrival by participating in a "nude in."³ Even though *Playboy* may have had its share of campus protestors, there were some universities who welcomed the arrival of the magazine. In 1956, Dartmouth College invited October Playmate of the Month, Janet Pilgrim, to the campus to help produce a play about *Playboy*. The school paper ran a contest

3. D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 303.

titled, "I would like to be like Janet Pilgrim because..." and the faculty held a tea in her honor.⁴ Brown and Hefner dismissed those who protested their publications as individuals who could not accept the realities of human sexuality nor give adequate respect to the choices about sexuality made by other people.

Playboy and *Sex and the Single Girl* presented challenges to the marriage-oriented society of the late 1940s and the 1950s. Rather than accepting marriage as the inevitable path to happiness for single women, Helen Gurley Brown designated marriage as the fallout shelter for single life. She wrote, "Marriage is insurance for the worst years of your life. During your best years you don't need a husband."⁵ Brown believed women should maintain their independence for as long as possible. Marriage, she insisted, provided the safety net for a single life that had met disaster.

Similarly, Hefner regarded marriage as institutionalized sexual repression.

Hefner made himself available for magazine interviews and television appearances where he attacked "our ferocious antisexuality, our dark antieroticism in America. The naked women of *Playboy*," he told his fascinated audiences were, "a symbol of disobedience, a triumph of sexuality, an end of Puritanism."⁶

4. Gretchen Edgren, *The Playmate Book: Five Decades of Centerfolds*, (Santa Monica, CA: General Publishing Group, Inc., 1996), 43.

5. Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, (New York: Bernard Geiss Associates, 1962), 4.

6. D'Emilio and Freedman, 303.

Hugh Hefner placed his magazine on the frontier of a new morality. *Playboy*, as he saw it, provided a guide to a revolutionary attitude toward sexuality that was both a healthier and more accepting approach to the intimate decisions of individuals.

Because of their radical views toward sexuality, *Playboy* and *Sex and the Single Girl* served as written examples of a different morality coming of age in the late 1950s and early 1960s. "The old taboos are dead and dying. A new, more permissive society is taking shape. The crucial question," was, "where the new permissiveness is leading, whether the breakdown of the old order is going to lead to some new moral system, or whether it is simply going to lead to the progressive disregarding of all social restraint."⁷ The fear about the new morality, promoted by Brown and Hefner, was that new ideas about sexuality would result in the complete disintegration of the nuclear family and its values and that America would become a society of animals immersed in a sexual mania. In reality, however, the attitudes toward sex that emerged during this era promoted a society where the intimacies of relationships were not guarded by social institutions and where individuals could explore themselves completely without the critical eye of an entire social scheme.

7. IBID., 308.

Crucial to the new morality emerging in the late 1950s and early 1960s was an attitude of sexual awakening that opened communication about sexuality. Charles Olson, an early *Playboy* subscriber, wrote to *Playboy* in November 1954, saying, "It's so great and so very refreshing, to find a magazine that, in your own words, a couple of issues ago, considers sex neither dirty nor a sacred cow. More power to you."⁸ In the form of print media, *Playboy* contributed to the growing conversation about sex and attempted to destroy any taboo about sexuality that regarded intercourse as shameful or unclean.

The new attitudes about sexuality also stripped away any societal convention that maintained that all sexual activity should be contained by the bonds of marriage. Helen Gurley Brown easily embraced the concept of premarital sex. She wrote of the dangers "which come from not having slept with the man you're going to marry, which I consider complete lunacy."⁹ Brown promoted sleeping with one's betrothed husband, but she did not restrict sexual activity to engaged women either.

Theoretically a "nice" single woman has no sex life. What nonsense! She has a better sex life than most of her married friends. She need never be bored with one man per lifetime. Her choice of partners is endless and they seek her.¹⁰

8. "Dear Playboy," *Playboy*, November 1954, 4.

9. Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, 28.

10. IBID., 7.

Brown promoted a single life for women that included a series of monogamous sexual relationships. She extracted sexuality from its proper place, marriage, and gave sexual freedom to single women.

Further, this new view of sexuality was indicative of a new kind of woman who was breaking the surface in the early 1960s. In *Where the Girls Are?*, Susan Douglas described the developing 1960s woman, writing, "She was also an active agent in the world, in control of her sex life and her future. This was a new kind of role model, and while she was highly convenient to men (and to advertisers), she also opened up new possibilities for women."¹¹ In comparison to the submissive, self-sacrificing housewife who dominated the post World War II era, the role model surfacing in the 1960s emanated independence and sexual liberalism.

College women were perhaps the most affected by changing views of female sexuality and increasing female opportunity. Highly educated women seemed to more readily dismiss the chains of sexual conventions. As an August 1955 *Playboy* article pointed out, "Dr. Lotte A. Find, discussing 100 average cases of girls who came to her for counseling, found that the smarter the girl, the less respect she seems to have for moral taboos."¹² College women were better prepared to make personal decisions about their intimate encounters than other women. But as that same *Playboy*

11. Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are?*, (New York, 1995), 69.

12. Jules Archer, "Don't Hate Yourself in the Morning," *Playboy*, August 1955, 21.

article explained, a woman's freedom of sexual choice was merely an extension of the autonomous woman. The article stated, "Girls trained through their studies - especially university students - choose sexual freedom as well as freedom to think out their own choice of profession or lifestyle."¹³ Even before Helen Gurley Brown's guide to intimate life arrived on the shelves, *Playboy* promoted a more liberated woman who had a choice about her career, her family, and her sexuality.

In addition to promoting sexual freedom and increasing choice for women in their personal and professional lives, the new morality insisted that an individual's sexual choices were personal and could not be dictated by any member of society. In a January 1955 letter to *Playboy*, one reader wrote of a man who had been sending critical letters to the magazine, "He'd become sort of a symbol here for those few in out society who believe they have the right to dictate manners and morals to the rest of us."¹⁴ Those who wished to impose their own moral standards on others became a rallying point for people who subscribed to the new morality. These moral police were a standard for progressive minded people to take arms against. The ideas that Hefner and Brown were promoting about sexuality centered on the concept that sexuality was personal and beyond the dictates of other individuals or institutions.

13. IBID.

These two publications, also, in an attempt to promote new ideas about sexuality, tackled society's ideas about virginity. In the postwar era, chastity outside of marriage was the feminine ideal. But by 1962, with the publication of *Sex and the Single Girl*, Helen Gurley Brown, blatantly refuted the postwar attitudes toward virginity:

I have yet to encounter a happy virgin. Quite the contrary, I feel she eventually finds social, religious and maternal approval quite inadequate compensation for not ever really belonging to anyone, and her state of purity becomes almost an embarrassing cross to bare.¹⁵

Brown's ideas about virginity maintained the belief that many virgins had not come to a decision to remain a virgin from their own careful consideration, but rather most women who preserved their chastity did so because they were tenaciously clinging to the moral dictates of their parents, friends, or priests. Brown insisted that virgins were unhappy not only because they had not experienced the pleasure of sexual contact but also because they refused to exercise their own minds for even the most intimate decisions.

Whereas Brown still connected the term virginity to purity, *Playboy* magazine attempted to separate the two concepts. "Some difficulties have arisen because of the confusion (in female minds) between virginity and purity. The two have nothing to do with one another, and it is important that you point this out at

14. "Dear Playboy," *Playboy*, 2 January 1955, 4.

the proper moment."¹⁶ Making the distinction between purity and virginity was important for Hefner's playboys because it could be used as a seduction tool. Convincing a virginal woman that the purity of her spirit had nothing to do with the state of her physical body may have helped persuade a young woman to more willingly accept a playboy's advances. But beyond its effectiveness in the art of seduction, separating the terms virginity and purity removed the mystification of sex. By separating her physical pleasure from her spiritual purity, a woman could dismiss the popular notions that sex outside of marriage was dirty or even evil.

Further, on the subject of virginity, *Playboy* accurately recognized that men and women were raised with large disparities in their lessons about sexuality. Smith's article read, "Most men recognize that virginity is an unpleasant little matter to be disposed of early in life...unfortunately, this important information has been withheld from a large part of our female population."¹⁷ *Playboy* described the convention of raising men and women with widely differing attitudes toward virginity. Men were expected to lose their virginity early in life while women were taught to carefully guard their virginity.

15. Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, 225.

16. Frankenstein Smith, "Virginity: An Important Treatise on a Very Important Subject," *Playboy*, 1 September 1954, 9.

17. IBID.

Perhaps the only realm of sexuality that these two publications did not embrace was the sexual relationships of same sex partners. *Playboy* did not include glossy centerfolds of barely clothed men nor did the magazine address homosexuality in any way. Brown's book even went so far as to dismiss homosexuality outright, declaring that a homosexual man was not a man, and her work refused to address the specific problems of homosexual women. Both publications dealt exclusively with the sexuality of heterosexual singles.

The kinds of bachelors and bachelorettes that Hefner and Brown were respectively attempting to mold were independent professionals with style. Because women had traditionally been confined to dependent roles as housewives and mothers, Helen Gurley Brown was forced to repeatedly emphasize the value of independence for the American single woman. She said:

Those who glom on men so that they can collapse with relief, spend the rest of their days shining up their status symbol and figure they never have to reach, stretch, learn, grow, face dragons or make a living again are the ones to be pitied. They, in my opinion, are the unfulfilled ones.¹⁸

Brown insisted that women who relied on men for their entire livelihood and identity got stuck in unfulfilling lives. With independence, she explained, came growth in personal confidence, mental faculty, and fulfillment.

18. Brown, 267.

Brown's ideas about independence for women were strongly supported by Gloria Steinem.

The development of the "autonomous" single girl is important and, in large numbers, quite new. Like Sallinger's Franny, she expects to find her identity neither totally without men nor totally through them. And as Franny had acting, she has work she wants to do and with which she feels identifies.¹⁹

As Steinem suggested, Brown sought to create a generation of women who worked to support themselves and who maintained relationships with men that were based not on economic need but on mutual affection.

Playboy was less concerned about promoting the importance of the independent male because the traditional role of men had been the bread-winning head of the family. The difference with *Playboy's* bachelors was that they had only themselves to support, and because they did not reap the benefits of a wife, bachelors needed to willingly assume some domestic responsibilities. In its first issue, the magazine described America's playboys:

We like our apartment. We enjoy mixing up cocktails and an hors d'oeuvre or two, putting on a little mood music on the phonograph and inviting in a female acquaintance for a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex.²⁰

Hefner's major challenge, then, was convincing his readers that domestic chores were not necessarily emasculating. The true

19. Gloria Steinem, "The Moral Disarmament of Betty Coed," *Esquire*, September 1962, 19.

20. *Playboy*, December 1953, 1.

playboy had good taste, was educated, and enjoyed conversations about philosophy and music. But most importantly Hefner's bachelors enjoyed the casual, though often intimate, company of women.

Money, as both Hefner and Brown proclaimed, was essential for a good single life. In the January 1955 issue of *Playboy*, the magazine claimed, "The man about town is concerned with clothes, cars, food and drink and the rest of the good things in life."²¹ For Hefner, being a successful bachelor meant belonging to an elite club of gentlemen who could afford fine things like chic decorated apartments and expensive, flashy cars.

Brown's book, too was filled with guidelines about how to manage money and insights into those extravagances in which a single woman should indulge and those that she should forego. John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman explained, "money was prerequisite to the successful single life, and it would come not from the largess of a male admirer, but through hard work."²² Money allowed young women to decorate their apartments and themselves so that they could convey an image of glamour.

In addition to being concerned with issues of financial success, Hefner urged his readers to avoid the financial trap of marriage. From its first issue, *Playboy* was warning its readers against the enterprising woman who would seduce a man into

21. "Dear Playboy," *Playboy*, 2 January 1955, 5.

marrying her and then divorce him, taking half his wealth by way of an alimony settlement. In an article titled, "Miss Golddigger 1953," *Playboy* reported,

Few fathers object to supporting their children but supporting an ex-wife is like buying oats for a dead horse. The marriage has ended. The unhappy stag is entitled to none of the privileges of a husband, but he's expected to pay for them as if he were.²³

As demonstrated in the aforementioned quote, *Playboy* reduced sex in marriage to an expensive form of prostitution. Marriage, the magazine suggested, signified a contractual economic agreement; therefore, when the marriage ends, so should the financial support for the wife.

Further, the magazine implied that women went to college to improve their financial situations and they did this not by preparing for a career but by hunting for a husband. In the June 1954 issue, the magazine expressed the opinion that, "If she goes to college; it isn't for an education. She's interested in just one subject - animal husbandry. And you're the animal."²⁴ *Playboy* suggested that even though highly educated women were more likely to dismiss social taboos about sexuality, these college women were also more likely to use their sexuality as a means for luring a husband.

22. D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 304.

23. Bob Norman, "Miss GoldDigger 1953," *Playboy*, 1 December 1953, 7.

24. Burt Zollo, "Open Season on Bachelors," *Playboy*, 1 June 1954, 37.

Perhaps the most effective sexual power a woman possessed when trying to lure a husband lay in her ability to reproduce. The August 1955 issue of *Playboy*, in an article titled, "Don't Hate Yourself in the Morning", Jules Archer wrote, "What most men don't realize is that psychiatrists have found that unwed pregnancy is no accident. It is a deliberate act of choice on the part of most girls."²⁵ *Playboy* insisted that most women want to get pregnant, and further that most women would use any means to win a trip to the altar.

Again college girls took most of the heat for being women who hoped for the altar so much they descended to trickery, using all their reproductive wiles to win a husband. "There are girls who, sometimes with the connivance of their ambitious mothers, deliberately trap desirable young men by getting pregnant."²⁶ *Playboy* and other magazines supported the claim that women coerced, connived, and conceived their way into the hearts and the wallets of men, using their reproductive power to purchase a wedding band.

But in conflict with these ideas about women's attitudes towards marriage and pregnancy, Brown and others maintained that working, single women considered marriage a backup plan to a single life. Gloria Steinem reported, "Among the so-called

25. Jules Archer, "Don't Hate Yourself in the Morning," *Playboy* 2 August 1955, 48.

autonomous working girls... six out of ten interviewed who were considering marriage said it was men who wanted to marry while they preferred to wait."²⁷ Though *Playboy* insisted women had vivid and pervasive dreams of spending their lives solely as housewives, Steinem and Brown alleged that women preferred to pursue an autonomous life, using marriage merely as a safety net for a failed single life. Nevertheless both *Playboy* and *Sex and the Single Girl* presented a view of marriage that was ultimately negative. Either marriage trapped men and their money in a life of misery or protected women from economic despair. Both views claimed that marriage failed to fulfill the promises of love and fidelity that postwar society claimed the nuptial vow insured.

Helen Gurley Brown, though, despite her insistence on removing women from a marriage marked by domesticity and placing them in careers marked by independence and personality, still wanted to maintain particular gender roles. She even harshly criticized those women who had a proclivity toward angry feminism:

Some girls "hate" men because they secretly envy their "superior advantages," their jobs, their ability to exploit...If you sustain any of these hates, you need help, probably professional, to find out how much nicer it is to be a woman.²⁸

26. Donald Eldridge, "More on Campus Mores," *Saturday Review*, 20 June 1964, 58.

27. Gloria Steinem, "The Moral Disarmament of Betty Coed," *Esquire*, September 1962, 157.

28. Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, (New York: Bernard Geiss Associates, 1962), 86.

Brown maintained that the successful single girl embraced femininity and also that she enjoyed men. Brown never suggested that women were at an unfair advantage because of their historical oppression, but rather she implied that women who harbored grievances against men were psychologically unstable.

Among the places where Brown did suggest there was a gender difference between men and women was in a man's ability to be faithful. Though Brown refused to doubt a woman's sincere attempt at fidelity, she implied that it was a man's natural inclination to be unfaithful.

Man is not monogamous no matter how much religion and social writ tell him he is. You don't like your adorable Persian kitty dragging a maimed, half-alive pigeon into your living room, but that's the nature of Persian kitties. Do you renounce all cats?²⁹

Brown suggested there was a forgivable, biological characteristic in men that led them inevitably to infidelity. *Playboy* would agree with Brown on this point. The magazine, in its early years, printed articles that, at least satirically, promoted polygamy.³⁰

Both publications also attempted to provide insights into the art of seduction. Helen Gurley Brown made suggestions about seduction that included details about the kind of head-turning dresses to wear, the kind of cigarettes to leave out so that they will be a convenient novelty for a man, and detailing menus, with

29. Brown, 237.

complete recipes, that were sure to reel in a single man. Brown suggested all of these tactics, claiming that women cannot, "cling wantonly to the days when men did the chasing."³¹ Brown claimed that it was women, not men, who ought to be trained in the craft of seduction.

Playboy, however, insisted that men still needed to learn techniques that would aid them in coercing women into their beds. One of the magazine's writers claimed, "The unvarnished truth in most cases is that the lady is willing, but wants to go on record as protesting and regretting."³² If a woman's protests were really ingenuine, then the most effective way of seducing her was to appeal to her desires.

Two of the approaches to seduction presented by *Playboy* were directly related to the historical culture in which the strategies for seduction were being implemented, meaning that these seduction methods were particularly applicable given the social circumstances of the late 1950s and early 1960s. First, *Playboy* suggested that bachelors appealed to a woman's fears of the atomic age. The idea was that you could convince a woman to participate in sexual activity by suggesting that at any time she might be destroyed in a nuclear attack; therefore, shouldn't she

30. Jay Smith, "A Vote for Polygamy," *Playboy*, (2 July 1955), 15.

31. Brown, 62.

32. Jules Archer, "Don't Hate Yourself in the Morning," *Playboy*, 2 August 1955, 21.

have experienced all the pleasure possible.³³ The emergence of *Playboy* during the atomic age served as a justification for the magazine's existence. In its first issue, the magazine declared its mission statement, "If we are able to give the American male a few extra laughs and little diversion from the anxieties of the atomic age, we'll feel we've justified our existence."³⁴ And in keeping with the magazine's sense of civic duty, *Playboy* sent its December 1964 Playmate, Jo Collins, to Vietnam to deliver a unit's first issue of a ten-year *Playboy* subscription.³⁵ The magazine used the threat of nuclear Armageddon as a defense for its overt support for sexuality outside of marriage and its exploitation of the female body.

The second method of seduction restricted to the period just following 1953, was the Kinsey Approach. Alfred Kinsey published a report on American sexuality in 1953 that disclosed female sexuality as much less repressed and much more active outside of marriage than most Americans previously believed.³⁶ Thus the Kinsey approach to seduction, advanced by *Playboy* in September of

33. Frankenstein Smith, "Virginity: An Important treatise on a Very Important Subject," *Playboy* 1 September 1954, 49.

34. *Playboy*, 1 December 1953, 2.

35. Gretchen Edgren, *The Playmate Book: Five Decades of Centerfolds*, (Santa Monica, CA: General Publishing Group, Inc., 1996), 107.

36. Alfred Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1953), p 468.

1954, promoted a peer-pressure method of charming a woman from the barstool to the bedroom.

Fortunately, though, *Playboy* did warn men against using their physical strength to force women into submitting to the bachelor's desires. Frankenstein Smith explained, "Boys are bigger than girls. And some guys figure that's all the advantage they need to make any seduction a success. Trouble is, that ain't seduction... The muscle method is too often confused with a dirty four letter word spelled r-a-p-e."³⁷ *Playboy* refused to support any kind of physically forceful approach to seduction. Not only did the magazine's writers consider the physical approach criminal; they deemed this "muscle approach" unnecessary.

Similarly, the magazine condemned taking advantage of a woman who had consumed too much alcohol.

It is unfair to take liberties with a lady who is unconscious. This cannot properly be considered seduction, since she has pretty well lost her "freedom" of choice. Some will argue that any amount of alcohol robs a person of a certain amount of free choice in such matters. We prefer to believe that liquor only gives a lady the courage to do what she would very much like to do when cold sober, but hasn't the nerve for.³⁸

In 1954, *Playboy's* attitudes toward alcohol maintained that liquor simply served as a tool of seduction. Decreasing a woman's inhibitions, a woman should have been aware that alcohol may lead

37. Frankenstein Smith, "Virginity: An Important treatise on a Very Important Subject," *Playboy*, 1 September, 1954, 9.

38. IBID., 49.

to a man's successful seduction. Where *Playboy* drew the line at alcohol's usefulness in aiding a romantic encounter, was when liquor became the 1950s version of the date rape drug, where a woman had consumed so much alcohol, she lost consciousness.

Finally, probing deeper than physical seductions necessary for sexual encounters, both Brown and Hefner addressed the psychological implications for the sexually fulfilled single person. First, the two publications attempted to rid their readers of any sense of guilt they may have felt for participating in sexual activity outside the guarded institution of marriage. *Playboy* published articles with titles like "Don't Hate Yourself in the Morning," designed to eliminate feelings of guilt. Similarly, Helen Gurley Brown wrote, "Remember that sex was here a long time before marriage. You inherited your proclivity for it. It isn't some random piece of mischief you dreamed up because you are a bad, wicked girl."³⁹ What Brown and Hefner hoped to do with these kinds of ideas was to chip away at the psychological barriers to healthy sex lives that plagued the minds of their readers.

Hefner further encouraged healthier psychological approaches to sexuality with the aid of his more educated readers. One *Playboy* subscriber, a clinical psychologist who wrote to the magazine, claimed, "It is my misfortune to encounter many people

39. Brown, 257.

whose difficulties are, at least partially based on distorted sexual values. It is a pleasure to find a public monument to the healthy contention that sexuality is a normal and pleasurable part of life."⁴⁰ Hefner received medical validation and justification for his magazine. *Playboy*, as he saw it, became a catalyst for more progressive and less repressive attitudes toward sexuality.

In addition, Brown hoped to convey a greater need for overall psychological health for her readers. Brown explained, "The point is, you may be much harder on yourself than you are on other creatures of nature who are less deserving of your tolerance. When you accept yourself, with all your foibles you will be able to accept other people too."⁴¹ Brown attempted to encourage increased self-esteem and self-acceptance among her readers.

Sex and the Single Girl also advanced a number of reasons why single women might become involved in a sexual relationship. Among the needs served by participating in a sexual relationship were physical urges, a sense of connectedness, security, "fringe glamour," and approval.⁴² Hugh Hefner's magazine embraced similar benefits from sexual liaisons.

40. "Dear Playboy," *Playboy*, 2 February 1955, 3.

41. Brown, 258.

42. IBID., 226-7.

In conclusion, *Sex and the Single Girl* and *Playboy* magazine attempted to change the prevailing attitudes toward sexuality in postwar culture. Helen Gurley Brown presented a new kind of man who is self-sufficient, psychologically mature and sexually active. Paralleling Brown's attempts to create a new role model for American women was Hugh Hefner's attempt to create an ideal picture for single men to follow. Hefner's playboys refused to marry, assumed responsibility for domestic tasks, and participated in guilt-free sexual relationships. More significantly, these publications provided an alternative to the traditional marriage and family oriented lifestyles of Americans in the postwar era. As *Playboy* magazine's circulation continues to be strong today, Helen Gurley Brown continues to contribute to the lives of single Americans through *Cosmopolitan* magazine which lines the newsstands as a guide for single women. Both Brown and Hefner continue to influence American society with their support for healthy sexuality whether it occurs within the suburban homes of married couples or in the trendy apartments of playboys and single girls.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The years between 1955 and 1965 were years when women's choices were expanding. The birth control pill provided greater contraceptive choices. At America's colleges and universities female students slowly started to challenge the conventions about sexuality that had dominated America's consciousness since World War II. Helen Gurley Brown and Hugh Hefner directly challenged sexual conventions that kept individuals from making introspective choices about their lives and their sexuality.

These years were not times of revolutionary change; however, they planted the seed for a sea of rebellion that would come just a few years later. Women who came of age just after World War II could not have imagined the kinds of social upheaval in which their daughters would be participants. But the years that separate suburban housewives and feminist rebels indicated a climate of inevitable change. Even though women between 1955 and 1965 gained only marginal control over their independence, women of this time period found a quiet rebellion in gaining greater control over their reproductive capacity and began to have a voice on university campuses and in the media.

Since World War II, acceptable sexuality, especially female sexuality, has been strictly defined by a number of institutional constructs. Academics, religion, psychologists, and politicians all had a stake in maintaining an ideal of the American family. But individually, women of the late Fifties and early Sixties suffered the difficult psychological task of combining the image of the all-American housewife with a highly individualized, rapidly-changing climate of sexual freedom. Greater access to birth control, prominent media attention to evolving sexual mores, and an increasingly liberal and autonomous academic campus contributed to the social and psychological challenge women faced from 1955 to 1965. Together scientists, journalists, and students took steps to change the climate of American sexual politics and to build, simultaneously, the foundation for the sexual revolution and feminist rebellion that would explode in the years to come.

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